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Chapter II

THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF THE KOLS

There is considerable variation in the material culture of the Kols. This is due to the economic changes which rapidly occur when these primitive people come into contact with cities and their industrial order. The Kols make excellent workers, and in many of the industrial centres of Central India the majority of the cheap labour is supplied by them. This group, however, is not typical of the Kols; and the following description of their material culture is based upon the village Kol, who, while having considerable contact with modern influences, still clings mostly to the older ways known to his people for centuries.

The Village. While this study is particularly of the Kols who are in contact with Hindu culture, nevertheless a few words should be written about the more primitive Kols who live in villages tucked away in some rather inaccessible spot. Such villages are usually not found among the trees of the forest, but in an open space. The form which the village takes depends on the terrain and also upon the general custom of the area. The Gonds generally build their houses in separate enclosures, each an individual unit. We have found a few Kol villages of this type. Sometimes there have been two or three houses within a thorny stockade.

It is more usual, however, to find the Kols grouped together as a single unit. The form of the primitive village varies, but the shoe-string type predominates. The village has but the one central pathway which winds between small courts plastered with mud and cow dung situated immediately in front of the house. The court is usually clean, the pathway seldom so.

Primitive villages do not show many signs of permanency. The huts are of a type that can be destroyed over night if it should seem wise to shift the village. In actual practice, however, the Kol does not make a move quickly. Most of these villages though very temporary in their make-up have nevertheless been in existence for years.

The cattle sheds, where they exist, form a part of the hut and may only be distinguished from human habitations by the fact that they are more open. The Kols do not keep pigs, nor do they have gardens about their huts. Sometimes a form of pumpkin may be allowed to grow by the wall and climb over the roof. A *nim* tree (*Melia azadirachta*) will usually be found on the central pathway and under it a raised platform of mud where most of the village worship is observed. There are, generally speaking, no well defined village

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361 boundaries. Such boundaries exist in theory, but are not always
[796] marked out. The religious ceremonies which are supposed to take them into account just go round the outskirts of the village, paying no particular attention to supposed boundary points.

363 The ordinary Kol village is not a pretentious affair. There will be one or two central paths, three to ten feet wide and up to 200 yards long, which are the main streets and which the houses face. If the terrain permits, these paths usually run in a northerly-southerly
[364] direction and are often winding. Between the houses there are little lanes through which one may squeeze to get to the back of the village
[342] where the trash is thrown. The houses are made of *chatai* walls plastered with mud, or possibly of thick mud walls. The roof is usually of grass, but cheap country tiles are frequently employed. A two-storied house is unknown except in the larger towns where brick is used and some wealthy person resides. There is no street in the ordinary sense of the word and the lanes which provide the outlets for the
361 various houses are narrow, dirty and tortuous. The individual group may have two small buildings, one of which houses the cattle, though
[343 it is not unusual to find the cattle kept on the veranda. It is from
231] such a village that the labourers go out to their fields which not in-
[241] frequently lie from two to three miles distant from the village. On the edge of most villages are seen a few meaner huts grouped together
621 and in these one usually finds the depressed and the untouchables.
564 The fact is at once known by the pigs which are all about such houses.
735 Where Kols do not have their own village and are attached to some larger village or hamlet the two groups usually live on the edge; but the Kol, generally speaking, is more cleanly than the lower groups whose houses occasionally adjoin his dwelling place. When questioned why they live apart the answer has usually taken a three-fold form:
[262] It is claimed first that Hindus do not like to have Kols living near them because they (the Kols) eat meat and especially pork, which is consumed at the time of sacrifice. The next reason is an economic one: Kols are too poor to rent lands or pay the house rent required in the
[427] villages. One rupee a year is the maximum paid outside the village and sometimes nothing is required save a bit of help to the *malguzar* or landlord when he needs labourers in his fields. Kols also claim that if they live in close proximity to the higher castes they would not be free to sing and play the drum the whole night through, a thing which they consider necessary at certain times of worship.

184 LIVING CONDITIONS. There is a good deal of variation in the
342 conditions under which the Kols live. In places where tenancy is
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Rs. 4-8-0 per 1,000 tiles molded and put on the rack to harden. They told us that the average Kol worker would mold about 1,000 tiles per week.

In Panagar there are about 100 families of Kols. Some of them keep chickens and sell the few eggs they get in the local bazaar, or even take them to Jubbulpore on market days. Three or four own bullock carts. The rest of the community divide their time between working on the roads and doing coolie work in the fields when such work is available. This brings them from two to three annas per day. This work is far from steady, being largely seasonal.

In Benda village there are fifteen houses of Kols. Their main work is breaking stone for the metalled roads and preparing limestone for the kilns. They believe that by steady work they can make up to Rs. three per week, but the work is very hard and the hours are long. A few collect *tendu* leaves in season and when other work is slack they go out to the jungles and cut wood. They can earn from three to three and a half annas per day in that way. None of the Benda Kols does any farming.

At Salavara village on the Gaur River, we found that all were engaged in breaking stones for road metal. Their report seemed to indicate that they had to work harder for what they got than some other groups. They said it took them fifteen days to break a *saikara*—a stone measuring approximately 1,000 cubic feet—that two men were required and that they received Rs. 2-8-0 for the *saikara*. Five years ago, they said, they got Rs. 4/- for the same measure. They claim that the work is also harder now as they have to go further for suitable rock.

At Garha close to Jubbulpore, there is a fair-sized Kol community. The village is quite distinct from any other place and about 100 Kol families dwell there. Their occupations are various, and but few have steady work. This group consists mostly of coolies who get work wherever it is available or where the best wages are offered. Sawing wood is a common opening as they do not live far from the timber yards where all the sawing of planks is done by hand. During the wheat harvest they are nearly all away in the fields, leaving their houses empty for the few weeks of the harvesting season.

On a preliminary visit to Rewa State we went to a small Kol community not far from Rewa City. These Kols have considerable land for which they pay rental to a Mahratta landlord. What this group told us has been confirmed by many others, both in and out of Rewa State and seems to characterize the conditions of the Kols there. One informant told us that he was married about twelve years pre-